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Appl. No. : 09/990,605
Examiner : Mamon Obeid
Docket No. : 703602.6

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

1-167. (canceled)

168. (New) A vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system configured to enable the validation of a mailpiece processed by the United States Postal Service (USPS), comprising:

a communications interface remotely coupled with a plurality of end user computers and a USPS computer system;

data processing circuitry communicatively coupled with the communications interface; and

local memory communicatively coupled with the data processing circuitry, the local memory comprising a database and a plurality of modules executable by the data processing circuitry, the plurality of modules comprising:

a tracking identification string allocation module programmed to allocate a unique tracking identification string to one of the end user computers in response to a tracking identification string request from the one end user computer;

a postage indicium generation module programmed to generate a unique postage indicium in response to a unique postage indicium request from the one end user computer;

an indexing module programmed to index the unique postage indicium by association with the unique tracking identification string; and

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a database management module programmed to store the indexed unique postage indicium in the database and programmed to retrieve data corresponding to the indexed unique postage indicium from the database in response to a USPS postage indicium request, from the USPS computer system, comprising the unique tracking identification string.

169. (New) The vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 168, wherein the unique tracking identification string is unique within the USPS for at least one year.

170. (New) The vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 168, wherein the data corresponding to the unique postage indicium comprises data representative of one or more items selected from the group consisting of postage amount, date and time of postage information creation, service class, optional data advance, and delivery zip code.

171. (New) The vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 168, wherein the postage indicium generation module further comprises:

a digital signature generation submodule programmed to generate a digital signature; and

an association submodule programmed to associate the digital signature with the data corresponding to the indexed unique postage indicium.

172. (New) The vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 171, wherein the digital signature generation submodule is programmed to apply a private key to the data corresponding to the indexed unique postage indicium to generate the digital signature.

173. (New) The vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 172, wherein the data processing circuitry comprises a physically secure coprocessor device.

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174. (New) The vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 173, wherein the digital signature generation submodule is executable by the physically secure coprocessor device.

175. (New) The vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 168, further comprising a communications module executable by the data processing circuitry, the communications module programmed to receive, over the communications interface, the unique postage indicium request from the one end user computer, the tracking identification string request from the one end user computer, and the USPS postage indicium request from the USPS computer system, the communications module being further programmed to transmit, over the communications interface, the unique tracking identification string to the one end user computer to allow the one end user computer to affix the unique tracking identification string to a mailpiece.

176. (New) The vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 168, wherein the communications interface is remotely coupled with a centralized master tracking computer system within the USPS computer system, the communications module being further programmed to transmit a vendor request for the unique tracking identification string to the centralized master tracking computer system and programmed to receive the unique tracking identification string from the centralized master tracking computer system in response to the vendor request for the unique tracking identification string.

177. (New) The vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 176, further comprising a tracking number request module executable by the data processing circuitry and programmed to generate the vendor request for the unique tracking identification string.

178. (New) The vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 168, wherein the unique tracking identification string is a USPS delivery confirmation code.

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179. (New) The vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 168, wherein the postage indicium generation module is programmed to generate the unique postage indicium, and wherein the unique postage indicium comprises ascending register information relating to the an account of the one end user computer, date information for the indicium, and a digital signature of the ascending register information and date information, the vendor-controlled centralized postage-issuing computer system further comprising:

a postage indicia validation module programmed to validate the retrieved unique postage indicium and comprising a digital signature submodule programmed to verify the digital signature of the retrieved unique postage indicium with a public key; and

a communications module programmed to transmit, over the communications interface, an indication of whether the unique postage indicium is valid to the USPS computer system.